

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 05503 150912Z

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6393

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL BRISBANE BY POUCH

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE BY POUCH

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EMIN, EINV, ENRG, AS

SUBJ: CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP OF GOA DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS AND
ENERGY

1. AUGUST 15 PRESS CARRIED REPORTS, WHICH WE UNDERSTAND
WILL BE OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED LATER TODAY, THAT SIR LENOX
HEWITT, PERMANENT HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS AND ENERGY,
WOULD BE REPLACED BY JAMES SCULLY, CURRENTLY DEPUTY
SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS TRADE. HEWITT, ACCORDING
TO REPORTS, WILL BE APPOINTED CHAIRMAN OF NEW CONSOLIDATED
BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR THE TWO GOVERNMENT-OWNED AUSTRALIAN
AIRLINES, QANTAS AND TRANS-AUSTRALIAN AIRLINES.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MOVE IS CLEARLY TO REMOVE HEWITT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS AND ENERGY, WHERE HE HAS
BEEN PRINCIPAL ASSOCIATE OF MINERALS AND ENERGY MINISTER
REX CONNOR IN DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INCREASINGLY
CONTROVERSIAL, HIGHLY ANTI-FOREIGN INVESTMENT GOA MINERALS
AND ENERGY POLICY. AVAILABILITY OF VACANCY IN QANTAS
CHAIRMAN'S POSITION AND PLAN TO CREATE NEW CONSOLIDATED
BOARD FOR TWO AIRLINES PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY TO
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PAGE 02 CANBER 05503 150912Z

ACCOMPLISH HIS REMOVAL FROM MINERALS AND ENERGY.

3. SCULLY HAS HAD BRILLIANT CAREER IN DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS TRADE AND PREVIOUS DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND IDUSTRY WHERE HE HAS MADE DISTINGUISHED RECORD AS POLISHED AND CAPABLE PUBLIC SERVANT, TOUGH NEGOTIATOR AND SOLID ADMINISTRATOR. HIS APPOINTMENT SHOULD BE WELCOMED BY BOTH PUBLIC SERVICE AND BUSINESS CIRCLES WHERE COMBINATION OF HEWITT'S ABRASIVE PERSONALITY, SECRETIVE AND CENTRALIZED ADMINISTRATIVE STYLE AND CONTROVERSIAL CONNOR-HEWITT POLICY APPROACH HAS BEEN WIDELY RESENTED. SCULLY WILL AT MINIMUM BRING GREATER ADROITNESS AND DIPLOMACY TO BUREAUCRATIC BUSINESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS OF DEPARTMENT'S OPERATIONS. QUESTION OF WHETHER HE WILL HAVE IMPORTANT IMPACT ON POLICY POSITIONS HITHERTO MAINTAINED BY CONNOR MORE DIFFICULT TO ASSESS.

4. IN THIS CONNECTION, HOWEVER, IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT CONNOR WIDELY RUMORED TO BE SLATED FOR DEPARTURE FROM HIS PORTFOIL SOMETIME DURING COMING MONTHS. MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE DISPLACEMENT OF HEWITT IS FIRST PHASE OF A DECISION BY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM TO REMOVE BOTH HEWITT AND CONNOR.

5. EMBASSY COMMENT: WHILE IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT PERSISTENT RUMORS OF CONNOR'S EARLY REPLACEMENT BY SENATOR WRIEDT, CURRENTLY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, MAY PROVE CORRECT, EMBASSY BELIEVES THIS POSSIBILITY MUST STILL BE CONSIDERED AN OPEN QUESTION. BOTH CONNOR AND HEWITT, ORIGINALLY HIGH IN PRIME MINISTER'S ESTIMATION, LOST MUCH OF THEIR POLITICAL STANDING DURING RECENT \$4 BILLION OVERSEAS LOAN FIASCO IN WHICH BOTH PLAYED A CENTRAL AND INEPT ROLE. BUT CONNOR, UNLIKE HEWITT STILL HAS IMPORTANT POLITICAL SUPPORT IN SOME SECTORS OF ALP AND COULD NOT BE DISMISSED FROM CABINET WITHOUT SERIOUS POLITICAL COSTS, AS EVIDENCED BY FACT THAT HE WAS UNTOUCHED IN RECENT CABINET RESTRUCTURING WHICH INCLUDED DISMISSAL OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CAIRNS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT WHATEVER THE OUTCOME ON CONNOR, SCULLY'S ACCESSION WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 CANBER 05503 150912Z

SOME SOFTENING, HOWEVER MARGINAL, IN CONNOR'S POLICIES. CONNOR IN RECENT WEEKS HAS MANIFESTED AWARENESS OF HIS WEAKENED POSITION, HAS OPENED HIMSELF TO UNPRECEDENTED PRESS CONTACT AND MAY IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE ESSENCE OF HIS PROGRAM BE MORE DISPOSED TO MODERATE ON INDIVIDUAL SITUATIONS. MOREOVER, SCULLY'S PAST FAMILIARITY WITH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS PROBLEMS, DERIVED FROM HIS DEPARTMENT OF MINERALS AND ENERGY MORE RECEPTIVE

ON DAY-BY-DAY BASIS TO BUSINESS APPROACHES. IN THE
LONGER RUN, HOWEVER, ANY MAJOR CHANGE OR REVERSAL OF THE
POLICY LINES ESTABLISHED BY CONNOR WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE
TO AWAIT CONNOR'S EVENTUAL DEPARTURE FROM THE DEPARTMENT.
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